

Penelope

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Penelope

> <meta name="Generator"> Penelope

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All of Psi Corps defense and intelligence was a buzz. A promising, young telepath, a girl named Penelope Jennings, had disappeared. But what was more important was the information the girl knew.

Which would have been quite okay if she was under tabs. But she wasn't, and that was the problem.

Already a special team was trying to piece together what might have happened to her.

Austerling stormed into the director's office. "I demand to know why I was not placed on the investigation team," he demanded, "I have the most experience in this type of matter. I should have been the first person you looked at. Why am I not on the team?"

"You would really like to know?" the director asked.

"Yes," Austerling seethed.

"You were not placed on the team because she's one of yours, Austerling. She's your daughter. And despite the Psi Corps all being one big family, the parent-child bond is still there, and we couldn't

let that get in the way of the investigation," he said.

"With all due respect, sir, I've never even met her. How could I possibly have a bond with her?" Austerling shot back.

"As it seems you will not be satisfied till I place you on the team, I will assign you to it. But I'll take you off again as soon as it looks like there's a problem," the director replied.

"Thank you, sir," Austerling replied

After two frustrating weeks of work, the investigation team was no closer to any answers.

One afternoon, as Austerling was briskly walking to who-knows-where, a girl came up beside him and matched his pace.

"Hi," she said."

"Hello," he replied, not looking to see who it was.

"Hello," she said.

"Look, I really don't have time for this..." he trailed off.

"Hi again," she said cheerfully.

The girl was Emiliy. It had been a fair number of years since he had last seen her, and the disturbing teen was a young woman now.

"What do you want? No, I should just wait and ask Marie, shouldn't I?" he said.

"You could," Emiliy grinned idiotically, "Come."

She led Austerling to a secluded park bench, where a woman sat.

Marie to be exact. And she wore the exact same outfit as he had always seen her wear.

"I believe I told you our paths would cross again," she said.

"Look," Austerling told her, "I'm on a very important assignment right now. I don't have time to play games with you. I don't know what it is with you, but don't you think you've ruined my life enough as it is? Does torturing me bring you pleasure?"

"Sit, Mr. Austerling," Marie replied, "As unfortunate as it is that I can not give you a puzzle to solve. We are here to aid you in the collection of one of you telepaths. Penelope Jennings is her name, is it not?"

Until this time, Austerling had been standing, ready to run if Marie allowed Emiliy a chance at revenge.

Now, he sat down beside Marie on the bench.

"How can you help me? Do you know where she is?" he asked.

"I do indeed know where she is. But you must retrieve her," Marie answered.

"Why me?" Austerling asked before he caught himself.

"Some things you need not know," Marie replied cryptically.

"I don't know. I don't know the circumstances of her disappearance. I should bring the whole investigation team," Austerling responded.

"Oh, no. You can't do that," Emiliy piped up.

"Any why not?" he asked Emiliy.

"Much too dangerous. They'd get killed," she answered merrily.

This was not a pleasing answer for Austerling however.

"Still, every time I get involved with either of you, my supervisors think they need to put me in a straight jacket. If I can't bring the team, I won't have definitive proof," he told them.

"Who would you need proof for? I never said you were coming back," Marie spoke.

"Then I'm not going, if I'm not coming back," Austerling stated firmly.

"Do you really think you could stop me from bringing you along?" Marie asked.

"No," Austerling sighed, as Marie grabbed his hand and Emiliy's and off they went.

Austerling opened his eyes, hoping he'd not been teleported into the void of space.

He let out a sigh of relief. He was on a planet, or at least, it looked that way. With Marie he wasn't anticipating on the beaten path.

"Is this the place?" Marie inquired to Emiliy.

Emiliy nodded, "It bloomed!"

She ran off and twirled around under a tree in the falling petals.

"Is she always like this?" Austerling asked Marie.

"She has done a great deal of maturing since you saw her last," Marie replied.

"Sure," he muttered, still not understanding the idea of regressive maturation.

"Emiliy," Marie called, and the girl returned like a sad puppy. She laid a hand on Emiliy's cheek, and offered a small smile, "When this

is over, you may stay here as long as you wish."

Emiliy nodded, and started off walking. Marie followed, and Austerling decided that his chances of survival would be greater if he stayed with them.

"Hey!" he spoke, "What were you talking about?"

"With Emiliy? She had seen many things while she's been with me, some of which have been traumatic. She longs to spend some time away to think and sort out her mind. Since she finds this planet so delightful, I told her she could spend her time here. But first we must stop the current situation," Marie explained.

"What is the current situation?" Austerling asked.

"If I knew, would I tell you?" Marie replied.

"I don't know," Austerling replied, "If you didn't know, I suppose you wouldn't tell me. But you could tell me you didn't know, which would be telling me what you know. Though if you were telling me what you knew, I don't see how you could know."

"I simply know I do not know," Marie replied.

"That doesn't make sense," Austerling said, furrowing his eyebrows.

"It is simply the act of realizing you do not have a piece of information. I believe your culture is quite proficient with that," Marie stated.

"Yes, we're good at knowing we don't know. But we're not as good at knowing how to find out what we don't know," Austerling said, shaking his head, "No wonder my superiors think I'm crazy. I don't even understand myself!"

"Understanding is a secondary requirement," Marie said.

While Austerling shook his head and randomly gestured into the air trying to figure out what he had just heard, the group continued walking.

Eventually the landscaped garden gave way to rows of potted plants. Apparently a nursery of sorts. They passed a section of potted trees that had overgrown their pots, turned a corner, and encountered a greenhouse-like building.

"She knows we're here," Marie stated, stopping before the door.

"No, really," Austerling said sarcastically.

"It won't matter. She would find us sometime before we reach her. And the element of surprise is only minimally advantageous," Marie spoke, "Be careful once we're inside. She may have set up defenses."

Marie took point, and it was probably a good thing she did.

Upon opening the door a large pair of gardening shears dropped from the ceiling, and stuck forcefully into the dirt floor.

After that Austerling stayed close, as Marie carefully sprung traps before they became a hazard to their health.

Rounding a bed of geraniums, Marie froze in a row of orchids. The orchids had climbed high on their supports and now came together overhead, forming a tunnel. The heady scent filled Austerling's nose. He never really had time for flowers, what with living in an apartment and being a Psi Cop, though at his rate the title wasn't far from being yanked.

It was a moment before he realized that Marie was still frozen in place.

"Marie, are you coming?" he asked aloud.

Can't, Marie replied directly into his mind, _She knew! I can't believe it! She knew somehow!_

Knew what? Austerling shot back.

She knew the frequency at which my physical form is held together. By emitting a similar pitch, she has effectively paralyzed my physical body, Marie answered.

Why don't you just leave your body? Go back to your non-corporeal self? Austerling questioned.

Can't. Wouldn't work. I can't leave my physical body without dissolving it, and if it's paralyzed, it can't dissolve, can it?

--

No, I guess not, Austerling replied.

You and Emiliy will have to continue to without my help.

--

Austerling glanced at Emiliy. He didn't trust the girl. Not after the last time he'd seen her without Marie.

No way! he told Marie, _Last time she was without you, she tried to mince my mind. Don't think I'm gonna give her another chance!_

--

"Oh, I won't try that again," Emiliy spoke up. Austerling turned to her, and she rewarded him with that creepy, angelic grin.

He shuddered.

Alright, he turned back to Marie, _I'll go. But I won't like it._

--

Emiliy nodded, agreeing with it all. She exchanged a mental message with Marie as well, though too fast for Austerling to even make a go at trying to listen in.

It felt strange leaving Marie behind. Austerling noticed almost immediately that he missed her omnipotence. Greatly.

They continued on and passed through another set of aviary doors and this time entered a real aviary. Previously they had not heard the sound of birds, but now the noise was deafening.

A single trail wound through the habitat foliage in the high roofed room.

Austerling peered about as they passed by. He couldn't see any of the birds. They must be up in the trees he rationalized.

A sharp howl split the air, and he cringed.

"Howler monkey," Emiliy said without stopping.

"Is it alien?" he asked, noting that his ears were ringing.

"To here, yes. To Earth, no. It's an indigenous species there," she explained. Austerling wanted to ask if she was sure. It sounded un-Earthly, like a primitive predator of some sort.

Though the building was tall, it was much shorter than he would have expected. Shortly they came to another set of double doors.

"She's here. Don't you sense her?" Emiliy asked.

"No, there's nobody here except you and me. I can't even sense Marie, but then, I never can sense her," Austerling replied, slightly puzzled.

Emiliy sighed, "This is where I must come clean with you, Austerling. None of us may return from this place. As you have seen, this child is extremely powerful. Enough so, that she could stop Marie from even getting near her... I have no idea why she hasn't stopped us yet, though she certainly could. I think though, that she is trying to figure out why your mind is so like hers. She is so like you that you may be the only one who can stop her."

"What is she doing that needs to be stopped?"

"She's destroying herself. Her mind's unstable due to experiments done to her by your Psi Corps. If she dies, she'll take whole sectors of hyperspace with her. You must open your mind, or she will destroy you as well. Do you understand?" Emiliy continued.

"Sort of. What do you mean 'open my mind'?" Austerling questioned.

Emiliy glanced nervously at the doors, "No time."

Shoving at the heavy doors, Emiliy flung them wide open and marched in. Austerling had no choice but to follow.

The first thing he noticed was the clear-covered pond down the middle of the large room. As far as Austerling knew, it was a fairly new decor idea. The second thing he saw were the tall, scalloped columns that lined the wall, alternating pink granite and alabaster. The

third thing he realized was that there was a girl, perhaps in her young teens, standing in the room. Her eyes were the same crisp, sharp brown as his own. These pierced Austerling's own, as she watched the two newcomers.

"You! You're the helper of that being. That alien creature! Leave me alone!" she shouted upon seeing Emiliy, and a shift of the eyes, and Emiliy was thrown by invisible forces against the columns. His daughter, if she truly was, was a teek! How was he supposed to stop her if she was that powerful?

Emiliy drew herself up. She was made of sterner stuff than Austerling would have guessed. As he watched, Emiliy began to dip into her inner wellspring of power, and let out a disabling noise. Cracks formed in the pillars and the glass shattered in place over the pond. The girl screamed in response and reached out to hurt Emiliy's mind. Before she got a chance, Emiliy closed down her mind as she'd done with Austerling before. Penelope was that what her name was? It seemed years since he'd taken on this case. Penelope, frustrated about not being able to get a grip on Emiliy's mind, turned to him. "And who the heck are you?" she growled. Without pause Austerling dashed behind a pillar, as if it could protect him. As she pursued, Austerling dashed between pillars like a fleeing mouse.

Her harsh mind grasped at his. Cold and sharp. Suddenly Austerling didn't care if she was his daughter or not, this had to stop. He grasped a piece of granite chipped from the pillars and chucked it at Penelope. The aim was accurate and she stumbled for a moment after it struck her in the head. A voice filled his head, telling him what he should go. "What the heck?" Austerling sputtered.

The voice identified itself. "Oh, it's you, Marie!" Austerling breathed. He'd never thought he'd be happy to be near her presence. He resumed his pattern of weaving and hiding. Marie was holding off the girl's mental attacks, but urged him as well to think of some way to stop Penelope. You must have some weakness that she could have! She's your own offspring! Marie spoke in his head.

I don't have any weaknesses! Austerling shot back.

I highly doubt that, Marie replied, Your race didn't develop telepathy on its own. Of course you have weaknesses! And need I remind you, despite the fact that you are in excellent shape, you are being chased by a child who has more endurance than you, and who is a stronger telepath. THINK HARDER!

--

He thought and thought a bit more, but it was the stitch in his side that eventually gave him the answer.

I know something that'll work. How do I get into her mind though?

--

I'll weaken her guard, Marie answered, But you'll have to find her weakness and stop her.

--

Austerling stepped out from behind the pillar and encountered Penelope. Without a second thought he followed Marie's trail into the girl's mind.

The feel of someone else's mind was something Austerling had felt many times before in his occupation. PsiCops could not be troubled by controlling others' minds. Penelope's mind was by far the most precise and driven one Austerling had encountered thus far. Moving through the tracks and paths of her mind, he came to the weak spot, and banished the madness and confusion.

Everything paused, and then all the pieces began to fall in together.

The confusion gone from her mind, Penelope let go of all her traps and all her mental endeavors that were in progress. She simply stopped everything, and smiled.

Emiliy, danger gone, came out of hiding in her own mind and slowly stood in assessment of her facilities.

Marie withdrew from Austerling's mind and formed up her human appearance.

Austerling collapsed to the ground and went unconscious. Never in his life had he exerted so much of his telepathic ability at one time.

The trio of women gathered around his crumpled form.

"Who is he?" Penelope asked.

"Your father," Marie answered.

"Will he be alright?" she questioned.

> "I believe so. He simply needs time to recover his strength," Marie replied.<p>

The first thing Austerling saw as she awoke was Emiliy's expectant face.

"No! Don't let her get me!" she shouted, hiding his face in his pillow.

Emiliy looked not at all surprised by the reaction, but Penelope asked, "What does he mean?"

Marie grinned, "He and Emiliy have a unique history as you may one day discover."

She walked over and peered at the cowering Austerling, "Austerling, she won't hurt you. I need to leave, so there are some things we should discuss. "

Wandering among the original trees Austerling had seen when he'd first arrived, Marie explained. "There are many things I've got to do in the galaxy. So much to do, so little time, I remember that quaint saying of your race. So I will be leaving shortly. In other matters, it is possible for you and Penelope to return to Earth. Do you wish

to do so?"

"Is there another option?" Austerling inquired.

"Indeed. You may remain here. Forever free of your Psi Corps with Penelope. I have offered Emiliy the opportunity to take leave of her duties for several months, and I'm most certain she would help you and Penelope get settled here. And you could instruct your daughter in the proper use of her powers," Marie replied, watching the falling petals.

"Sure, but what the heck am I supposed to do with her being a teek?" he answered.

"Ah, you refer to her telekinetic abilities. Emiliy can begin her education in that direction, and I will of course return to see you both," Marie spoke, then glanced at her watch, as if it meant anything to her.

"When are you coming back?" Austerling asked. Marie gave him her enigmatic grin; "Does it matter when I come back? I always do," then vanished.

A/N: Finis - What a trilogy. Let me know if you'd like to see more Marie. I'll write more once summer's here.

End
file.